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McGill and the Agency: Recruited but not signed

President McGill has been a subject of the CIA's attention since his years as a Harvard graduate student.

In 1953, McGill said in a recent interview, he received a letter from Virginia asking him to attend an employment interview in Boston. A second letter identified the potential employer as the CIA. McGill, who then was completing his Ph.D. in psychology, wasn't interested.

About six years later, when McGill was an assistant professor at Columbia, he got a call asking him to go to a midtown Manhattan office. This was just before he was to make a trip to Europe for an academic meeting.

McGill recalled that he went to the office and "was then briefed by a woman who told me they were the CIA." The Agency, he said, "wanted me to tell them who represented the Soviet Union at the meeting I was to attend."

McGill agreed to take notes at the proceedings and be debriefed by the CIA on his return to the United States.

Almost 20 years later, the Agency became the subject of McGill's attention. Like 43 other college presidents, he learned

from the CIA that professors at his institution had worked on projects in the Agency's MKULTRA program.

He initiated an investigation, based on documents the CIA provided, to determine who at Columbia had been involved in the studies of mind-altering drugs and related personality control research. (Professor William Thetford's studies, described in the accompanying article, were those involved.)

McGill corresponded with CIA Director Adm. Stansfield Turner through the fall of 1977, in an effort to expose all possible links between the university and the Agency. That exercise, and his previous contacts, inspired McGill's fascination with the CIA's work. He is philosophical about the ultimate efforts of the Agency's contact with the academic world.

"The real evil that the CIA has let loose on us is that by engaging in these sort of activities without formal guidelines, they have raised a level of paranoid suspicion in all the universities."

"This whole problem wouldn't have arisen if the CIA had understood the fact that the whole center of our activity is based on truth," McGill said.